

JFK's murder is fodder for a course

By RICHARD KERNS
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EMMITSBURG — Unlike most classes at Mount St. Mary's College, students walk out of "The Kennedy Assassination" with more questions than answers.

"It's frustrating for them because there are no easy answers," said the Rev. James Delaney, who has taught the course on John F. Kennedy's death for nine years. "It's not what they're used to. It's not 'Murder, She Wrote.'"

The full-semester course provides an in-depth study of the circumstances surrounding the Nov. 22, 1963, assassination. How in-depth? One lecture next month will deal exclusively with "The First Shot."

Conducted with an emphasis on criminology, the course details criminal profiles, ballistics and past assassinations. (The first attempt on a U.S. president occurred in 1835 against Andrew Jackson. The accused in the case was defended by Frederick attorney and poet Francis Scott Key.)

Two sessions are devoted to the Kennedy Administration's foreign and domestic policies, charting moves that alienated many powerful people. "I never realized he had so many enemies," said Chris Hayes, a senior majoring in criminal justice.

The course also highlights the mysterious and sometimes bizarre circumstances that emerge from nearly every facet of the case: Wounds on the corpse "move" in two different autopsy reports; Lee Harvey Oswald calls an FBI agent when he's arrested in a bar fight in September 1963; the limousine travels at 11 mph., despite Secret Service

regulations mandating a minimum speed of 20 mph.

"Maybe it's a coincidence," the Rev. Delaney said of one such episode in a recent class, uttering the phrase in a practiced tone, as if it caps each lesson.

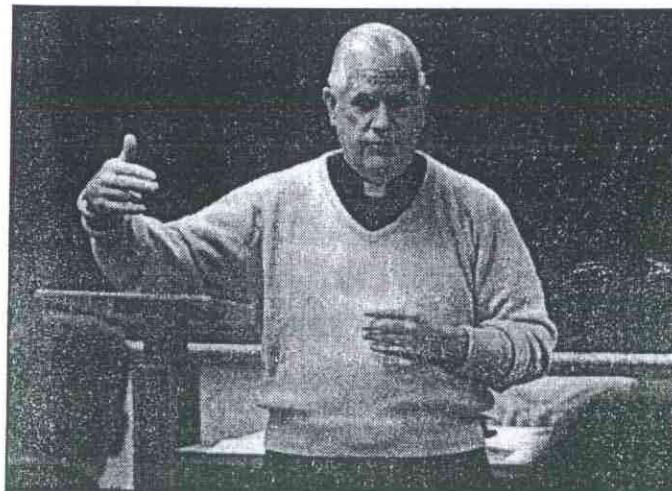
The Rev. Delaney compares the numerous inconsistencies surrounding the case to a puzzle. "I tell the students, 'I'm going to give you the pieces, and hopefully by the end of the course they will fit together,'" he said.

In the final exam, the Rev. Delaney asks the students to present their own theory about the most famous unsolved crime in history. Though some have gone as far as to accuse former First Lady Jackie Kennedy of the crime (claiming she was tired of his alleged carousing), most attribute it to a hit by governmental agencies such as the CIA or FBI.

A sociologist, the Rev. Delaney attributes students' mistrust of government to cynicism generated by the Watergate era, as well as the many questionable links between Oswald and intelligence organizations.

the Rev. Delaney himself attributes the assassination to a Mafia hit, saying JFK and his brother, Attorney General Robert Kennedy, incurred the wrath of numerous crime bosses in their campaign against the Mafia.

Owing to the popularity of the course, most of the students in the class are seniors, who schedule first. Born in the late 1960s, they weren't even alive when the shots rang out in Dallas, and cannot relate to the event in the traditional "Where were you when it happened?" context. The



Staff photo by Kelly Hahn

The Rev. James Delaney teaches a class on the assassination of John F. Kennedy at Mount St. Mary's College.

Rev. Delaney said many look on the case as distant American history, like Lincoln's assassination.

The Rev. Delaney, who was teaching a psychology class at the Mount when he heard the news of the assassination, said he has read 50 books on the topic and is anxious to see the new Oliver Stone movie on the assassination.

Describing the circumstances surrounding the assassination as "a

monumental what-if," the Rev. Delaney in one lesson plays the "what if" game. What would have happened if the president had listened to Jackie, who wanted the top up to keep her hair from being windblown.

The Rev. Delaney, who dismisses the Warren Commission report as being predisposed to the lone gunman theory, said he doesn't think any new conclusive evidence will ever come to light.